

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE NATURE AND STUDY OF THE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE OF THE SEPTUAGINT

The symposium for which this study has been written is devoted to translation technique. In this century, and especially in the last three decades, several thorough studies have been written on the translation technique of the LXX, even though the research of the past century had required such studies already at that time. Important aspects of that area have now been analyzed, but at the same time we are still far removed from a full understanding of the translators' techniques.

Even if translation technique has not been studied thoroughly in the past, it has always been of interest. Of special concern were the techniques used by the first translators, since they had no earlier models to consult, they had to devise their own. The case of the LXX is especially interesting, since that translation transposed a Semitic text into a language which had a completely different structure. Hence, the LXX translators had to cope with difficult problems, as they had to locate equivalents for grammatical categories of the Hebrew language which had no exact or even approximate equivalents in Greek, and sometimes none at all. For example, the Greek language has no equivalent for the Hebrew infinitive absolute construction (קטל קטלתו), or for constructions with ויהי or ויוסף, or for the combination of אשר with the so-called redundant pronoun (e.g., אשר ... עליו). By the same token, Greek contains constructions which do not exist in Hebrew. Thus there is no equivalent in Hebrew of the genitive absolute construction, and the Greek verbal system is much more developed than that of Hebrew. Furthermore, when translating the Hebrew, the translators were often faced with distinctions required by Greek which were not made in Hebrew. Thus the translators often had to make a decision between the modes of the Greek verb, or between its various tenses, such as those of the past.

What exactly is meant by the study of translation technique has not been a matter of dispute among scholars, as little attention has been devoted to the definition and demarcation of this area. Two publications

illustrate this lack of clarity. The collection of articles published by S. Jellicoe as *Studies in the Septuagint: Origins, Recensions, and Interpretations* (New York 1974) contains a section named 'Text, Translation Technique.' Several studies in that section are indeed devoted to matters of text, and under the heading 'translation technique' the editor included a study dealing with anthropomorphisms as well as a study of the bisection of books for the purpose of translating. However, many articles could have been found for the rubric of 'translation technique.' Likewise, the *Classified Bibliography* contains a section (paragraph 16) devoted to 'translation technique,' listing mainly articles on composite authorship.

What is translation technique? That term has become a terminus technicus denoting the special techniques used by translators when transferring the message of the source language into the target language. This includes the choice of equivalents, the amount of adherence to the Hebrew text, the equivalence of Greek and Hebrew grammatical categories, and etymological exegesis. It also refers to some of the conditions under which the translation was written and about which information is included in the translation itself: cooperation between translators and use of earlier translations. In this definition revisional activity is not included, although that, too, could be included under the heading of translation technique.

When reviewing the literature on translation technique, we note that no relevant section is found in the various publications of Nida, but Nida is really more interested in analyzing modern Bible translations than in describing ancient translations.¹ Likewise, Swete, *Introduction* contains no section nor even a paragraph on translation technique, nor does the Introduction by Fernández Marcos.² Jellicoe, *SMS*, 314–318, intended as an update of Swete's *Introduction*, does contain a section on 'translation technique.' That section, however, merely speaks about the categories 'free' and 'literal' in the translators' approaches, and not about other aspects of translation technique.

On the other hand, the popular *A Handbook to the Septuagint* by R.R. Ottley (London 1920) does contain a section dealing with problems of translation technique, even though that term is not used. In chapter V ('The character of the translation: the Greek and the Hebrew'), Ottley

¹ E.A. Nida and Ch.R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden 1974). E.A. Nida, "Principles of Translation as Exemplified by Bible Translating," in: R.A. Brower, ed., *On Translation* (New York 1966) 11–31, esp. 22 ff. where Nida speaks of 'grammatical categories.'

² N. Fernández Marcos, *Introducción a las versiones griegas de la Biblia* (Textos y Estudios 'Cardenal Cisneros' 23; Madrid 1979).

deals with the difficulties in rendering categories of Hebrew grammar into Greek. His examples refer to the Hebrew and Greek tenses, relative clauses, the infinitive absolute, the repetition of elements in Hebrew, and various other peculiarities of both languages. The discussion is short, but sets out some of the basic problems.

Several thorough studies of translation techniques have been written in this century, while a first beginning was made in the last century. At this juncture the difference between grammatical studies and studies of translation technique should be pointed out. Grammatical studies take the language of the LXX as their point of departure, treating that language within the framework of the development of the Greek language as a whole. It is known that the language of the LXX has been influenced much by its Hebrew source, but it is natural to treat the LXX merely as a document of the *koine* language, because the LXX is such a Greek document. Studies of translation technique, on the other hand, focus on the techniques used in the translation of the Hebrew into Greek and when doing so they also contribute to our understanding of the Greek language. Grammatical studies thus center on the language of the LXX, while studies on translation technique also analyze how this special language came into being. A major difference between the study of language and of translation technique is that the latter takes the categories of the Hebrew as its point of departure, while the study of grammar necessarily starts with the categories of the Greek language. Thus, an analysis of the various renderings of the causative aspects of the *hiph' il*, such as carried out in my own study "*Hiph' il*"* exemplifies the study of translation technique.

On the other hand, scholars interested in the Greek language compare the forms used in the LXX with the overall picture of the Greek language in the *koine* period, and also with the development of the Greek language over the centuries. In the case of the causative endings, certain causative verbs used in the LXX are not known from other sources. This may be a matter of coincidence, since only a fraction of the evidence relating to the Greek language is known, but it is not impossible that the LXX translators coined new forms. See Tov, "*Hiph' il*"* for details.

The study of translation technique started in modern times, to the best of my knowledge, in 1841. In that year two important studies were published within a close geographic proximity. In Erlangen, Thiersch published his *De Pentateuchi versione alexandrina libri tres*, and Frankel issued in Leipzig his *Vorstudien*. The third book of Thiersch's *libri tres*, named *Hebraismi*, deals with various idiosyncrasies of the language of the LXX created by the adherence of the translators to the Hebrew. This

is a first discussion of translation technique in the true sense of the word, since in every paragraph it also treats the background of the phenomena in the Hebrew. There had been treatises on the language of the LXX also before 1841, but these did not sufficiently take into consideration the Hebrew background of that language. In this third book, Thiersch discussed the use of pronouns, cases, prepositions, renderings of the *lamed*, tenses and conjugations of the verb, of the infinitive absolute, etc. The remarks in this work, however, are haphazard, and not based upon much evidence. Thus on pp. 130–131 he remarks on the existence of a so-called ‘nominativus absolutus,’ but he does not tell the reader how frequent the phenomenon is, and which Hebrew constructions were rendered by it. Likewise, Thiersch has fine insights into the causative verbs of the LXX ending in $-\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$, $-\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$, $-\acute{\omicron}\omega$, and $-\acute{\upsilon}\nu\omega$, of which $-\acute{\omicron}\omega$ and $-\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ usually reflect the *hiph’il*, but again, these remarks are impressionistic, very brief and without reference to the frequency of the different renderings (pp. 151–153). On the equivalence of the tenses of the Hebrew and Greek verb one finds some remarks on pp. 153 ff.

Frankel’s study of translation technique is a real *Vorarbeit*, paving the way to his subsequent discussion of the books of the Torah (*Einfluss*). At the beginning of the chapter devoted to translation technique (pp. 134–163), Frankel states that he wants to analyze how the translators conceived of the individual parts of the Hebrew language in order to better understand the ‘Übersetzungsweise.’ The discussion itself is subdivided into sections on the noun, verb, and particles. The remarks themselves are very short and therefore of limited value. Thus the first remark applies to the rendering of construct combinations in which the second noun has been rendered with an adjective rather than a noun, e.g. Gen 3:21 כְּתוּנֹת עוֹר – $\chi\iota\tau\acute{\omega}\nu\alpha\varsigma \delta\epsilon\rho\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$. In this case, Frankel provides just two examples, limiting himself to the remark that this type of rendering occurs often in the LXX (p. 134). However, what interests us more is how often this type of rendering occurs, with which nouns and in which books. Likewise, with regard to the present tense of the verb, Frankel remarks that ‘Das Präsens wird häufig für Perfectum gesetzt, e.g. Gen 15:2 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם – $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota \delta\grave{\epsilon} \text{Αβραμ}’$ (p. 141). It is, however, of great interest to know how often, in which conditions, and in which books the historic present is used in the LXX. Occasional and haphazard as these remarks by Thiersch and Frankel are, they advanced the study of the translation technique to a great extent. For these two scholars determined some of the categories which were to be studied in subsequent years, and Thiersch’s insistence on the *Hebraismi* as the background of the language of the LXX pointed to the direction which

the research would take. Somewhat more complete are the remarks by F.C. Conybeare and St.G. Stock in the only full treatment to date of the syntax of the LXX incorporated in their *Selections from the Septuagint* (Boston 1905). In the treatment of syntax which precedes this work (pp. 50–97), much attention is paid to the Hebraic background of many peculiarities of the language of the LXX. This work, too, is brief, and it presents the categories discussed by Thiersch and Frankel in a somewhat broader fashion as a descriptive grammar with some background in the translation technique. The work is aimed at the student who is trained in classical Greek rather than the student of the LXX.

In the generations following Thiersch, the study of translation technique was often incorporated in studies that analyzed the amount of adherence of the translators to the Hebrew *Vorlage*. This aspect of the language of the LXX intrigued scholars very much, probably because of the background of these scholars themselves in New Testament studies. Even the beginning student of New Testament Greek realizes how much that language is indebted to the LXX, so that all attempts to understand the Semitisms of the New Testament had to start with the Hebraisms of the LXX. One of the earliest studies of this kind was by Viteau, whose first major work was named *Étude sur le grec du Nouveau Testament. Le verbe, syntaxe des propositions* (Paris 1893). When Viteau realized in his conclusions (pp. 232–235) how much the LXX influenced the New Testament, the title of his next work included reference to the LXX.³ Likewise, the four-volume *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, which was started by J.H. Moulton (I, 1906), continued in collaboration with W.F. Howard (II, 1919–1929), and completed by N. Turner (III, 1963; IV, 1976), contains much valuable material on Semitisms in the New Testament and Hebraisms in the LXX, including statistical evidence on the LXX. Many more New Testament studies dwell at length on the LXX background of the language of the New Testament. M. Johannesson's now classic study⁴ was written as a *Vorarbeit* for New Testament studies, as the author points out in his introductory remarks. Johannesson wanted to show how much the language of the New Testament owed to the LXX, and for that purpose he investigated the Hebraic background of this phrase. This has been further stressed by Dibelius in his review of Johannesson's study: 'Die Arbeit gehört in die Reihe der Einzeluntersuchungen die heute allein imstande sind, das Problem der Septuaginta

³ *Étude sur le grec du Nouveau Testament comparé avec celui des Septante. Sujet, complément et attribut* (Paris 1896).

⁴ "Das biblische *kai egeneto* und seine Geschichte," *Zeitschrift für vergl. Sprachforschung* 53 (1926) 161–212.

Sprache und das der Abhängigkeit des urchristlichen Griechisch von dieser Sprache der Lösung näher zu bringen.⁵

In most of these works, the LXX and New Testament are rightly discussed on a different level, but other scholars treat them on a par, as if they are both components of one large so-called biblical language. The indiscriminate discussion of the translation language of the LXX and the language of the New Testament created many an imprecision.

The linguistic and lexical study of the LXX owes much to the study of the New Testament. Serious students of the language and grammar of the New Testament first analyze linguistic features and lexical peculiarities of the New Testament from the LXX, and hence the literature on the New Testament contains much relevant material on the study of the LXX.

While much of the interest in the language of the LXX derived from studies of the New Testament, the LXX was also studied in its own right. The Hebraistic nature of the language of the LXX remained one of the main focuses of interest, so that even when the New Testament was not explicitly mentioned, it was probably often interest in the New Testament that directed this line of research. This becomes clear from the introductory chapter in Thackeray, *Grammar*. A large section of the *Introduction* is devoted to 'The Semitic Element in LXX Greek' (pp. 25–55). The interest in Hebraisms is illustrated well by a thorough study by R. Helbing, *Kasussyntax*, whose subtitle stresses its focus: *Ein Beitrag zur Hebraismenfrage und zur Syntax der κοινή* (Göttingen 1928). This study analyzes in great detail the cases and prepositions used with verbs in the LXX, and one of the main preoccupations of the author is to show to what extent the translators were influenced by their Hebrew *Vorlage*. Especially in such minutiae as case endings and prepositions the real nature of the translation comes to light. Helbing showed how in the wake of the Hebrew, new constructions were born in the LXX which previously were unknown in Greek: *πεποιθέναι* with *ἐπί*, reflecting *על בטח*, instead of the genitive used in classical Greek with that verb, *βασιλεύειν* with *ἐπί* reflecting *על מלך*, instead of the genitive used in classical Greek with *βασιλεύειν*, and *ᾠμνυμι* with *ἐν*, reflecting *גשבע ב-*, instead of the accusative or dative used in classical Greek with *ᾠμνυμι*.

Thorough as this study is, it provides only 'Bausteine' for the study of Hebraisms (p. V). The book has no concluding chapter, and such a chapter probably would have necessitated a second monograph. A conclusion would have referred to the different behavior of the verbs, the

⁵ *Gnomon* 3 (1927) 646.

definition of Hebraisms in this context and the different number of Hebraisms found in the books of the LXX.

A study like that by Helbing contributes to the analysis of translation technique, since it illustrates the translators' dependence upon the Hebrew in such *minutiae* as prepositions. Also other studies written after Helbing show the translators' dependence upon the Hebrew. It is probably true to say that one of the focuses of interest in translation technique is exactly this dependence of the translators on Hebrew. At the same time, also scholars who did not set out to investigate this topic arrived at the same view. Thus, the conclusion cannot be avoided that the grammatical categories of the Hebrew influenced the translation to a great extent.

Beyond the general interest in the Hebraic background of the LXX, in recent decades several studies have been written which show an interest in the translation technique for its own sake. As a rule, such studies collect and analyze the data, and by so doing these studies provide a basis for conclusions on more general matters. In this way various areas of translation technique have been covered. These studies may be subdivided into the following areas: the verb, prepositions, word-order, pronouns, syntax, word choices and the degree of literalness. Updated bibliography is provided in *TCU*, 69–71 and in Dogniez, *Bibliography*.

The first study to be written in recent decades was by A. Wifstrand.⁶ In secular Greek the enclitic personal pronouns mostly precede the verb, but in the LXX they usually come after the verb because of the Hebrew. In Hebrew the pronouns are suffixed to the verb, e.g. *yiqtl^eleni*, or they occur after the verb, and the translators simply followed this sequence. Wifstrand investigated the different approaches of the various translators to this matter. Of these, the most literal ones reflect the grammatical habits of the Hebrew, while the free ones allow themselves to place the pronouns before the verb in accordance with the rules of the Greek language.

By far the greatest contribution to the study of translation technique by a single scholar is found in the work of I. Soisalon-Soininen and his students. Some of the topics covered by him are: the infinitives of the LXX, treated in a 200-page book; and furthermore articles on the status constructus, the Hebrew relative clause, the verb ἔχειν, some types of renderings of the preposition כִּי, the comparative מִן, the genetivus absolutus, and the independent personal pronouns. These studies are collected in his *Studien zur Septuaginta-Syntax* (AASF B 237; Helsinki

⁶ A. Wifstrand, "Die Stellung der enklitischen Personalpronomina bei den Septuaginta," *Bulletin de la Société Royale des Lettres de Lund* (Lund 1950) 44–70.

1987). The work of Soisalon-Soininen is based on an extensive card system in which the phenomena have been recorded. Two of Soisalon-Soininen's students wrote monographs on additional subjects.⁷ These two books as well as Soisalon-Soininen's monograph on the infinitives, provide important statistical data for the different books of the LXX.

⁷ R. Sollamo, *Semiprepositions*; Aejmelaeus, *Parataxis* (see p. 232, n. 14); eadem, *On the Trail of the Septuagint Translators—Collected Essays* (Kampen 1993).